

requests. She has negotiated with Democrat counterparts on a daily basis.

Through it all, Megan's colleagues have come to admire her patience, level-headedness, and the institutional knowledge she has built up; and so have we Senators.

Fortunately, the work has not been thankless. I remember Megan was especially thrilled when Senator Lamar Alexander made sure that Megan's help with the Music Modernization Act yielded a signed "thank you" note from Dolly Parton—one of her all-time favorites.

So as we, unfortunately, prepare for Megan's upcoming departure from the Senate, I want to thank her for her fine public service. Megan has made her native Kentucky proud; she has made her parents Dr. Albert and Robin Mercer very proud; and she has made me proud as well.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to speak as if in morning business.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ELECTIONS

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, today, the Senate Judiciary Committee released a report after an investigation of the circumstances surrounding Donald Trump's efforts to take over the Justice Department during the closing days of the last calendar year and beginning of this year.

Since January, the Committee has investigated reports that White House officials, including the President himself, pressed the Department of Justice to support President Trump's unsubstantiated bids to overturn the 2020 election results, and that Acting Civil Division Assistant AG Jeffrey Clark aided in that effort.

Today's interim staff report sheds new light on former President Donald Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 election. Jeffrey Clark became Donald Trump's Big Lie lawyer, pressuring his colleagues in the Department of Justice to force an overturn of the 2020 election.

Let me put this in perspective. The election was in November. The results were announced. Most of the world accepted it, but the former President, Donald Trump, never did. He filed a succession of lawsuits to prove that the election had been stolen. He failed in every effort in court. That was stage one.

Having failed in court with some of the most outlandish theories imag-

inable, but considered normal for the likes of Rudy Giuliani, they went into the second phase. The second phase was to coerce the Department of Justice and the Attorney General to intervene in the election results and to reach out directly, as the President did himself personally, to the election officials in States where he thought he should have won but he didn't.

So all that effort was under way when William Barr, President Trump's Attorney General at the time, issued a statement saying there was no evidence of widespread fraud in the election. That was disappointing to the President.

It occurred that in the middle of December of last year, William Barr, the Attorney General, announced that he was going to resign as of December 23. A man was chosen as the Acting Attorney General, Jeffrey Rosen, and Richard Donoghue as Deputy Attorney General.

There was a full court press on at that time by President Trump and his supporters to influence Jeffrey Rosen into intervening into this election contest. When I say "full court press," I am talking about repeated telephone calls and meetings in the White House over a period of 2 weeks.

This report, which we have brought to the attention of the public, as well as members of the Committee, obviously, went into detail as to what happened during that 2-week period of time. It was an incredible moment, which most Americans didn't even know was going on. We were a half step away from a full-blown constitutional crisis because what the President was trying to do was to convince the Attorney General to contact the leaders in the States where he thought—the President thought he had won the election and to tell them to not certify the results and to pick an alternative set of electors in some instances.

In each of these cases, the President was—President Trump—pushing a theory on why he actually won. These theories went from crazy to silly, to outlandish.

Let me give you one of them. It was called Italy-gate. I hope you caught this one because, naturally, Rudy Giuliani was somehow involved with this—some notion that Italian satellites were intercepting the voting machines in America and changing the results against Donald Trump. That is the nature of things.

In the State of Georgia, the President and his supporters were arguing that they have videotapes proving that people brought in suitcases full of ballots, and they showed these videotapes. The election officials in Georgia—which, I might add, all Republican—countered that by saying that those were actual containers of ballots and that was the ordinary process; there was nothing sinister going on there.

State after State, case after case, Trump was making the argument that he was cheated out of the election—

which, of course, was false, but he still believes it to this day—and putting the pressure on Acting Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen to be complicit in this plot. He even asked him to consider filing a special case in the Supreme Court across the street to stop the election results from being certified.

Our report shows that Jeffrey Rosen and his Deputy, Richard Donoghue, resisted this from the start. Jeffrey Clark, another Assistant Attorney General in the Civil Division who had nothing, literally, to do with this matter on a legal basis, were in conflict from that point—Clark, on the side of Trump, saying that the letters to the States should be issued, and Rosen and Donoghue arguing that there was no basis in fact, no proof of election fraud that could warrant that kind of unprecedented action.

In the meantime, many other players, like Mark Meadows in the White House, were also pressuring the Department of Justice. The net result of it was a fateful day—I believe it was January 3 of this year—when the President called Rosen, Donoghue, and Clark to the White House to pursue his effort to replace Rosen with Clark, a more complicit person in the process.

At that moment, two things happened that were significant. The White House Counsel, Pat Cipollone, dissented from the President's position and said it was a murder-suicide pact for him to engage in this. Secondly, at that point, the eight leading officials in the Department of Justice all said that they would resign en masse if there was a replacement of the Acting Attorney General by Mr. Clark.

The President hesitated and decided at the very last minute not to pursue that course, not to replace him. That was significant, I will tell you, because had it happened otherwise, there would have been a possibility that there would have been a contest on the election results.

What did the President do next after deciding that? Well, just for good measure, he ended up forcing the resignation of the U.S. attorney in Georgia who refused to buy his outlandish claims. It was the President's way of protesting that particular U.S. attorney's—Mr. Cox—independence in the situation.

What followed? We know what followed. In a matter of 3 days, this President, former President, desperate in his situation, having failed in every court case, having failed to take over the Department of Justice, decided to take his cause to the streets. We saw it in the U.S. Capitol 3 days later on January 6. The President turned loose a mob—a mob that was supposed to stop us from counting the electoral votes and electoral ballots.

Most people say: Well, we heard most of this story before, so what is the point of it? The point of it is that we were so close to a constitutional crisis at that moment that it bears continued investigation and disclosure so the

American people know that we should never be complacent when it comes to our rights as citizens and to our responsibilities to our Constitution.

This President, former President Donald Trump, would have shredded the Constitution to keep his office in the Presidency. There is no doubt in my mind.

To think that we reached that stage in history is certainly worth reflection for a moment. What more should we do going forward to make certain that we protect this democracy from the likes of Donald Trump or any of his successors in interest? That, I think, is a major responsibility that we face.

I hope this report from the Senate Judiciary Committee will reopen the conversation. I hope as well that the select committee of the House on the January 6 occurrence, the mob insurrection here at the Capitol—we submitted this evidence to them. I hope it is a benefit to them as they move forward.

I certainly hope that, on a bipartisan basis, we can decide that the ordinary course of action with a valid, legal election deciding the future of this country is always the best route in a democracy.

STUDENT LOAN DEBT RELIEF

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, there has been a controversy going on the last several years which has really been to the detriment of many good people.

In 2007, Congress made a promise to college students. Here is what we said 14 years ago: If you will give us 10 years of life in public service and you make your student loan payments during that 10-year period of time, at the end of it, America will forgive the remainder of your student debt.

We said that, and more than a million people took us up on the promise. They passed up perhaps higher salaries in more lucrative professions in order to serve the country. Then they discovered at the end of the 10-year period that the loan forgiveness they were promised wasn't coming. Nearly 99 percent of those who applied under the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program were denied relief, often for superficial clerical errors, loan servicing mistakes, or other matters beyond their control.

Well, good news: Those days of broken promises are over. Yesterday, the Biden administration announced important changes to this program to help hundreds of thousands of borrowers finally get the relief we promised over 10 years ago. The Education Department estimates the changes will immediately erase the debt of 22,000 borrowers, more than the total number of loans that have been forgiven so far under the program. All told, more than 550,000 borrowers could see a reduction in the amount of additional time they make in payments.

Servicemembers whose loans were deferred while they were on Active

Duty will have those periods of duty applied towards payments, as they should be. This is good news, and it is long overdue.

Many of my Democratic colleagues and I tried for 4 years during the Trump administration to fix this program. They ignored us. So I want to thank President Biden and Education Secretary Cardona for following through on their commitment to fix this important program and recognize the essential work of these public servants who sacrifice for this country and for the people who live here and should receive what we promised—helping hands on their student loans.

VACCINES

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, on another matter, today, President Biden is traveling to Chicago. He arrives with a simple message: Vaccines work.

In Illinois and across the country, vaccine mandates are saving lives and allowing life to return closer to normal. Over the past month, our State has experienced a nearly 40-percent decrease in new COVID cases. We are seeing similar trends around the country.

In the months since the Biden administration announced its policy requiring the majority of Americans to get vaccinated, the United States has finally begun to turn the corner against the delta variant. Over the past 2 weeks—2 weeks—our Nation has seen a roughly 25-percent decrease in new COVID infections. Hospitalizations have decreased by 20 percent, and deaths are down as well.

In Illinois, we are proud to support the Biden vaccine policy. In fact, some of the biggest employers in our State were ahead of the curve. In early July, Loyola Medicine in Chicago was one of the first health systems in America to implement the vaccine requirement. In August, United Airlines, based in Chicago, announced it would require its employees to get vaccinated.

At the time, skeptics questioned whether this would lead to mass resignations or labor shortages. They predicted chaos. Well, much to the dismay of the doomsayers, as of yesterday, more than 99 percent of United Airlines' employees in America have rolled up their sleeves and gotten vaccinated. Every major airline in the country has followed United's lead and introduced a vaccine requirement. This means safer skies for passengers and crew members. It is another big step back to normal.

Unfortunately, not everyone is on board with this science-driven approach. Earlier this week, one of my colleagues from Wisconsin took the floor and made some unfortunate and irresponsible statements about the safety of coronavirus vaccines. This false information, unfortunately, may mislead some people. Senator JOHNSON decided to bring an argument from a Facebook comment section to the floor of the Senate.

So let me say this: More than 700,000 Americans have now died from coronavirus. That is more than the number of Americans who have died in every war since the Civil War combined.

We have the power to prevent more needless deaths from this disease in the form of three remarkably safe and effective vaccines. Fully vaccinated individuals are 10 times less likely to die from COVID, 10 times less likely to be hospitalized, and far less likely to spread the virus.

The strong majority of Americans agree with President Biden's actions. Importantly, the administration's vaccine mandate is saving lives while also providing commonsense exceptions for those limited numbers of people who have medical or religious reasons.

The fact is, the President's vaccine policy is constitutional, evidence-based, and it is what America needs to once and for all put this pandemic behind us.

Still, some of our colleagues continue to oppose it.

Yesterday, the senior Senator from Utah once again introduced legislation that would do away with the President's vaccine policy. It would also allow anyone to sue the government or their employers for any perceived harm from vaccine requirements. What that harm might be is unclear.

Can you imagine the chaos in our courtrooms if the Senator from Utah has his way? Well, you don't have to imagine too hard because some States have already shown us the deadly cost of taking a stand against public health.

There are several States in our country that both threaten to sue the Biden administration and enact the policies on their own to ban vaccine and mask mandates. They include Texas, Florida, Utah, Arkansas, South Carolina, and Georgia. The leaders in these States have gone to extraordinary lengths to stymie public health efforts to save lives.

How has that worked out for these States? What has this dangerous, deadly policy of opposing vaccines and masks meant in those States?

Take a look at the map here.

This was the deadly cost of resisting science and vaccines between July 1 of this year and October 1. Of the 6 States—Texas, Florida, Utah, Arizona, South Carolina, and Georgia—their infection rates per 100,000 people was 4,441 compared to the rest of the country at 2,548 per 100,000. The death rate, sadly, was 54 per 100,000 in these 6 States, 20 in the rest of the country.

I bring this chart to the floor to make it clear that taking a political position is not about polling and deciding what sounds popular to so many people. It is about the life-and-death reality we face with this virus and this pandemic.

These leaders are arguing for a position against vaccines and against masks, and look who is paying the price: the men and women who live in